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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR REES HIGHLIGHTS MULTILATERAL SOCIAL  
ISSUES DURING GUATEMALA VISIT

REF: GUATEMALA 190

11. (U) Summary: Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees, Special Representative for Social Issues, visited Guatemala February 19-21. Rees met with senior government officials, civil society, and press to discuss human rights and other key social issues. He also visited a USG-funded community health center. He thanked the GOG for its support on U.S. multilateral initiatives, urged Guatemala to play a leadership role on promoting human rights, and emphasized the importance of action-oriented assistance efforts, especially for vulnerable populations. End Summary.

#### Support for Democracy and Human Rights

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12. (U) International Organization Affairs Special Representative for Social Issues, Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees, discussed human rights and other key social issues in a multilateral context during a brief visit to Guatemala February 19-21. Rees thanked Acting Foreign Minister Ibarra for Guatemala's co-sponsorship of the recently adopted UN resolution on the use of rape as a political instrument. He welcomed Guatemala's continued support and participation on similar multilateral initiatives, and urged Guatemala to play a regional leadership role to promote human rights, including human rights in Burma and Cuba. Rees underscored the importance of recognizing Kosovo's independence. He also highlighted the importance of results-based, action-oriented efforts to reduce poverty, prevent human rights violations, and protect victims. He urged government transparency to ensure that donor support reaches the intended populations, and stressed the need for a fair, independent, and transparent justice system.

13. (SBU) Ibarra assured Rees that Guatemala shares his concerns. He expressed GOG support for Kosovo's independence and right to self-determination, pending official GOG recognition (reftel). He stressed the government's commitment to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, ensure transparency, and end Guatemala's culture of violence and impunity. He noted that the Executive will respect the independence of the Supreme Court. He welcomed USG support to help implement fair and prompt justice and to improve living conditions for the poor.

#### Advances and Challenges on Social Issues

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14. (SBU) Archbishop's Human Rights Office Executive Director Nery Rodenas raised three issues of concern to the Catholic Church with regard to impunity. He expressed concern that clandestine groups involved in the 1998 murder of Bishop Juan

Gerardi were still operating and that the alleged masterminds, former members of the Presidential Guard, remained at large. He also expressed concern over the existence of child trafficking networks and called for strict control of the adoption process. Regarding Guatemala's recently reinstituted death penalty, Rodenas commented that the Catholic Church opposes the measure and that Guatemala, like most countries in Latin America, is a signatory to the American Convention on Human Rights which forbids instituting new death sentences. Ambassador Rees responded that the issue is a difficult one, agreeing with Rodenas on the risk of error in applying the death penalty, but expressing doubt about the argument that the death penalty does not deter crime.

15. (SBU) During a luncheon roundtable hosted by Ambassador Q5. (SBU) During a luncheon roundtable hosted by Ambassador Derham, civil society leaders and international organization representatives discussed advances and challenges on a range of social issues. They agreed on the difficulty of implementing international agreements. As a preemptive measure against prospective constitutional challenges, Congress generally petitions the Constitutional Court to make rulings on the constitutionality of international agreements prior to approving implementing regulations. They also discussed the adverse impacts of insecurity, impunity, chronic malnutrition, and lack of education. Former presidential candidate Harold Caballeros observed that judicial appointments had become politicized, while UNICEF Country Representative Manuel Manrique complained that laws exist but, in practice, are not enforced. A significant problem is authorities' lack of knowledge of legal instruments, said Rob Wayss, AFL-CIO Solidarity Center Central American Representative, who is working to educate workers and authorities on their rights and obligations.

16. (U) On a positive note, Rees pointed out that attitudes toward human rights have changed dramatically with the recognition that human rights are universal and inalienable, and not government-created. In the past, he said, human rights discussions were political discussions in which many conservatives focused on communist countries while many of those on the left focused only on human rights violations by right-wing dictatorships. Today, people openly discuss human rights, whether violators are friends or enemies. Former Vice Foreign Minister Altolaquirre highlighted the new National Forensic Sciences Institute of Guatemala (INACIF) and the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) as two key successes. She also noted a decrease since 1994 in violent crimes committed by former members of Civil Defense Patrols (PACs) as a result of state actions.

#### Economic Development

17. (U) Rees recommended implementation of economic development policies, such as micro- and medium-credit. Acting Foreign Minister Ibarra agreed on the importance of strengthening medium-size producers, which he estimated represent 85 percent of the country's total revenues. On free trade, he noted that Guatemala is open to trading with all countries.

18. (U) Re-elected Guatemala City Mayor Alvaro Arzu, whom Rees first met in Guatemala in the late 1990s when Arzu was president, discussed progress since Rees' last visit. Arzu noted that Guatemala's mountainous topography, characterized by an extensive interior dotted with small, indigenous communities, has impeded economic development. However, he remained optimistic about Guatemala's future. He viewed Guatemala as dynamic and evolving, in a stage of development "between childhood and adulthood," with increased tourism and global trade opportunities. From its historical focus on regional trade, Guatemala has emerged as a global player. Arzu noted that Guatemala is now exporting technology and that Guatemala City is experiencing a jobs-generating construction boom.

Press Outreach and Visit to USG-Funded Program

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¶9. (U) In an interview with local print media, Ambassador Rees discussed his views of President Colom's social development agenda, the problem of social inequality, the populist movement in Latin America, and the state of human rights in Guatemala. He cautioned that redistribution of income is not the solution to social inequality and poverty reduction. The government must invest in education to ensure that all sectors of society have equal access to educational opportunities, and provide economic incentives to boost free enterprise. Rees said the United States does not oppose freely-elected populist governments in Latin America, but warned that in every election politicians tell people what they want to hear. Once in power, some modify existing structures to perpetuate their own power, and this does cause concern for the United States and other democratic countries. On the future of social issues in Latin America, Rees noted that governments have made much progress on human rights in the last 20 years. He said governments realize that the ideologies of the past are not enough to solve the problems, and that a free economy is the "engine of poverty reduction."

¶10. (U) Ambassador Rees visited USAID-funded Pro-Family Q10. (U) Ambassador Rees visited USAID-funded Pro-Family Social Welfare Association (APROFAM), a private, not-for-profit, Guatemalan NGO that provides for family health needs, especially for low-income families with limited access to health services. With 30 clinics, 11 hospitals, and four mobile medical units, APROFAM is the second largest provider of family planning services after the Ministry of Public Health. It attends to an average of 600 patients per day in its central clinic. According to members of APROFAM's Board of Directors, the cost of services at APROFAM clinics is 40-50 percent of costs at other private health care centers, but APROFAM generates enough revenues to subsidize community services. In FY2007, APROFAM provided over one million services, including medical evaluations, counseling services, immunizations, and maternal and reproductive health care, to 450,000 people.

¶11. (U) Ambassador Rees cleared this cable.  
Derham